DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 453 CG 022 776

AUTHOR Hamburg, David A.
TITLE Early Adolescence: A Critical Time for Interventions in Education and Health.
INSTITUTION Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 18p.; For "Turning Points," see ED 312 322. Reprinted from the 1989 Annual Report.
AVAILABLE FROM Carnegie Corporation of New York, 437 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10022 (free).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescent Development; *Adolescents; Daily Living Skills; Intermediate Grades; *Intervention; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Preadolescents; School Health Services
IDENTIFIERS *Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

This document presents a personal statement concerning the recommendations in "Turning Points," a 1989 publication of the Carnegie Corporation's Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. This document suggests how the reformulation of middle grade schools along the lines recommended in "Turning Points" can improve the life chances of young people. It begins by briefly reviewing special features of education in early adolescence, then considers the concept of a transformed middle grade school. Seven recommendations from "Turning Points" are examined: (1) dividing large middle schools into smaller communities for learning; (2) providing a core program to all students; (3) maximizing students' opportunities to be successful; (4) giving teachers and principals primary responsibility and authority for middle schools; (5) preparing middle school teachers to teach young adolescents; (6) forming alliances between families and school staff through mutual respect and trust; and (7) linking schools and communities in educating young adolescents. The health component of early adolescent education is also considered and these issues are discussed: life sciences and education for health, school as a health-promoting environment, and ensuring access to health services. The role of the middle school in promoting social support and life skills training is emphasized. The report concludes by encouraging a serious national effort to reform the neglected phase of middle school education and to continue improving it in the future. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Carnegie Corporation of New York

Early Adolescence: A Critical Time for Interventions in Education and Health

by David A. Hamburg, President

Reprinted from the 1989 Annual Report

Carnegie Corporation of New York

Early Adolescence: A Critical Time for Interventions in Education and Health

by David A. Hamburg, President

437 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022

Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation that was created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to "promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States." Subsequently, its charter was amended to permit the use of funds for the same purposes in certain countries that are or have been members of the British overseas Commonwealth. Its total assets at market value were about $909 million as of September 30, 1989.

Early Adolescence: A Critical Time for Interventions in Education and Health

Since its inception in 1911, Carnegie Corporation has been deeply engaged in the improvement of education. During the 1980s, this has meant commitment to a fundamental reassessment of American education throughout childhood and adolescence. Several lines of inquiry and innovation have already been reported in these annual president's essays. Surely one of the most striking of recent activities has been the publication, in 1989, of *Turning Points* and related follow-up work, which have focused public attention as never before on the badly neglected subject of early adolescent education.

The report is the product of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, an operating program of the Corporation created in 1986 to place the compelling challenges of the adolescent years higher on the nation's agenda. As its first major commitment, the Council established the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents under the chairmanship of David W. Hornbeck, former Maryland superintendent of schools and a nationally recognized leader in education. Anthony W. Jackson, an expert in educational policy, served as executive director. Members of the task force were drawn from education, research, government, health, and the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. They commissioned papers, interviewed experts in relevant fields, and met with teachers, principals, health professionals, and leaders of youth-serving community organizations. They examined, firsthand, promising new approaches to the education and healthy development of young adolescents, drawing heavily on the existing research base.

Turning Points, the result, fills a serious gap in reports on education reform in the 1980s. It delineates ways to build support for and educate young adolescents through new relationships among schools, families, and health and community institutions. It not only seeks basic upgrading of the middle grade school — the pivotal institution of early adolescence — but aims to facilitate the personal development of these young people in and out of school. In these pages I will try to suggest how the reformulation of middle grade schools along the lines recom-

Note: the president's annual essay is a personal statement representing his own views. It does not necessarily reflect the foundation's policies.

mended in *Turning Points* can improve the life chances of young people from many backgrounds, including those raised in poverty.

Special features of education in early adolescence

The world is being rapidly transformed by science and technology in ways that have profound significance for national economic well-being and for democratic society. Increasingly, the United States must strive to develop the talent of *all* its people in order to be economically vigorous and socially cohesive in the altered world of the next century.

To do so, it will be essential to take advantage of the neglected opportunity provided by the fascinating and highly formative period of early adolescence — ages ten to fifteen. Just emerging from childhood, trying earnestly to steer toward the fog-enshrouded world of adulthood, young people of this age are vulnerable but highly responsive to environmental challenge. This time provides an exceptional chance for constructive interventions that can have lifelong influence.

Puberty, signaling the onset of adolescence, constitutes one of the most far-reaching biological and psychological upheavals in the life span. For many youngsters, it involves drastic changes in the social environment as well. Foremost among these is the transition from elementary to middle school or junior high. These years are also highly formative for behavior patterns in education and health that can have enduring significance.

Adolescence is typically characterized by exploratory behavior, much of which is developmentally appropriate and socially adaptive for most young people. Young adolescents are often said to be mainly cranky, rebellious, turbulent, self-indulgent, incapable of learning anything serious or "civilized." In fact, they are full of curiosity, energy, imagination, and emerging idealism. Some of their questions are explicit, some vaguely formulated, for themselves and for others. They want to know, What is happening? Is it interesting? Is it fun? Does it lead anywhere? Is it grown up? If I do it, will I make a fool of myself? What can I do to be better liked? What can I do to get smarter? What can I do to get stronger? What can I do to get better looking? What can I do to give myself a good future? What kind of person am I, anyway? What can I become? Does anyone care about me? What do I really care about? Can I make a difference? How does school relate to the rest of my life?

Many of the behaviors of adolescents carry high risks: cigarette smoking, alcohol and drug use, early sexual experimentation, poor nutrition and lack of exercise, anti-social activity, hostility toward school leading toward dropping out. Initially these risky behaviors are tentative and thus present an exceptional opportunity for preventive interventions before damaging patterns become established.

Adolescents at this early age need to find ways of earning respect and a durable basis for self-esteem, inquiring habits of mind, reliable and close human relationships, a sense of belonging in a valued group, and a sense of usefulness in some way beyond the self. They need to find constructive expression of their inherent curiosity and exploratory energy; and they need a basis for making informed, deliberate decisions — especially on matters that have large consequences for their education and health.

The challenge for educational and youth-oriented institutions is to help provide the building blocks of adolescent development. As constituted, however, most American junior high and middle schools do not meet the developmental needs of their students. On the contrary, they are an arena of casualties, among both students and teachers. Recent research notes a range of problems — all of which have alarming implications for students' engagement with school.

As young adolescents move from elementary into the middle grades, they report less satisfaction with their teachers and negative feelings toward specific academic subjects. Absenteeism, dropping out, and other symptoms of alienation from education all begin to increase during this period. In this same era, many adolescents start using alcohol and cigarettes and illicit drugs.

For most young people, the shift from elementary to junior high or middle school means moving from a small, neighborhood school and the stability of one primary classroom to a larger, more impersonal institution, usually at a greater distance from home. In the new setting, schedules may place students in six to seven different classes each day, each with a different set of classmates and a new teacher, and each offering unrelated subject matter. This kind of structure creates real obstacles for students needing to link with stable peer groups and establish close relationships with caring and supportive adults.

The sudden increase in the number of teachers and other school personnel comes at a time when young people are rethinking and renegotiating their relationships with their parents. Adolescents still look primarily to parents for guidance on fundamental, long-term values. Their need for reliable, caring relationships with other adults, not just parents, has by no means abated.

Middle grade education should lead children through the initial physical, intellectual, and social transformations to adulthood and equip them with capacities for thought and action that will be fully compatible with a productive adult life. It should build competence in basic skills, and foster critical thinking. It should lay the foundation for the world of work and provide a constructive orientation toward democratic citizenship and community service. It should enable students to have successful experiences and to develop caring relationships.

Though this is a tall order, experience at good schools in many nations shows that it is feasible. The time has come for a fundamental reassessment of the pivotal institution in the lives of these young people. The middle grade school must change, and change substantially, to cope with the requirements of a new era to give students a decent chance in life and help them fulfill their youthful promise.

The recommendations of *Turning Points* address this challenge, while acknowledging that the school cannot do what needs doing in the next century without a lot of cooperation from other institutions.

A transformed middle grade school

Turning Points offers a set of governing principles for a transformed middle school. It urges the division of large middle grade schools into smaller communities for learning, functioning on a more human scale with sustained individual attention for each student. Middle grade schools, says the report, should provide a core

program that fosters curiosity, problem solving, and critical thinking among all students. Middle grade schools should be organized to ensure students' success, by instituting cooperative learning approaches and using other pedagogical techniques suitable for this age group. Teachers and principals, not distant administrative or political bodies, should have the major responsibility and authority to transform middle grade schools. Teachers should also be specifically prepared to teach young adolescents and be recognized for this accomplishment.

Families and school staff, moreover, should be allied to each other under terms of mutual respect. Businesses, community organizations, colleges and universities, museums, and other institutions should bring relevant resources into joint efforts with schools to educate young adolescents, including educating them for community service. Importantly, schools should be environments for health promotion; they should emphasize the life sciences and education for health in the curriculum.

A closer look at the main recommendations is useful at this point to convey a sense of the ways in which these aims can be pursued in and near actual schools:

Large middle schools should be divided into smaller communities for learning. Three steps can make middle schools more conducive to the formation of communities that genuinely support and encourage education:

1) *Schools within schools.* A school-within-school, or house, is a clearly marked area within the larger building designated for a group of students and teachers. A house should contain 200 to 300, but not more than 500, students. It is a self-contained, cohesive unit, where students preferably remain throughout their middle grade years. This house creates the conditions under which teams of teachers and students can come together, advisers and students can get to know each other well, and students can form close relations with peers under circumstances favorable for education.

2) *Teams of teachers and students.* Most middle grade schools are organized by academic department. This makes common planning by teachers of different subjects difficult. The result is a fragmented learning experience for students. In contrast, the team approach clusters teachers of different subjects who teach the same students. This allows teachers to integrate curricula across subjects and work together to meet students' needs. Students in turn can move from class to class with a relatively stable group of classmates. Experience shows that the morale of teachers working together in this way rises, and classroom discipline problems often decrease. Mutual aid among the teachers can be a powerful facilitator of the educational process.

3) *An adult adviser for every student.* Every student should be well known by at least one adult in the school — preferably by more. As it is, guidance counselors are each responsible for as many as 500 students. Such caseloads spread the counselors impossibly thin. The transformed middle school would provide time and a structure for teachers and other professional staff to become mentors and advocates for students and the primary contact for parents. These small-group advisories and expanded homeroom programs would relieve guidance counselors, who would retain vital functions — supervising teachers in their advisory

role and counseling students with problems that go beyond the advisers' training.

Middle grade schools should provide a core program to all students. A dynamic, adaptable democracy requires that everyone, not just a select elite, contribute to the common good. At present, many students leave the middle grades without the skills necessary to meet such obligations. Middle grade schools can ensure that every student knows how to think critically and imaginatively about topics that cut across categories, how to lead a healthy life, and how to meet the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society.

1) *Learning to think critically.* Cognitive development is not in abeyance during early adolescence. In these years students can learn to challenge the reliability of evidence; to recognize the viewpoint behind the words, pictures, or ideas presented; to see relationships between ideas; and to ask "what-if" questions. Curricula and teaching methods should be designed to stimulate thinking, not merely to transmit information. Active participation by students in discussion is valuable. Teaching subjects grouped around integrating themes can help students to see systems rather than disconnected facts. Tests assessing students' learning should require demonstration of a wide range of thinking skills, rather than simply the retention of facts.

2) *Learning healthy lifestyles.* Schools can capitalize on the young person's natural curiosity about bodily changes and the transition to adulthood by integrating education for health with life sciences education. An understanding of biology and behavior is crucial in helping the young adolescent develop the ability to make wise choices about substance use, diet, exercise, sexuality, and other aspects of health. Yet the prevailing approach treats health education as a fringe elective of minor importance.

3) *Learning to be active citizens.* Every middle grade school should require students to participate in community service as part of its core program. This should involve systematic preparation, supervision, discussion, and write-up. Within the school, students can work as tutors, laboratory assistants, or student court officers. Outside the school, they can assist in child care, help the handicapped, or work with the elderly. They can work in soup kitchens, day-care centers, or parks. The Early Adolescent Helper Program, sponsored by the City University of New York, is a good example of this approach. Many believe such programs can be of special value for disadvantaged youth from the inner cities, helping them make a valued social contribution, develop generic job skills, and build self-esteem through solid accomplishment. For all students, service can teach values that promote citizenship, a sense of responsibility, empathy, respect for diversity, cooperation in problem solving, and lawful behavior.

Middle grade schools should maximize students' opportunities to be successful. Success of one kind or another is an attainable goal for all students in the transformed middle grade school. Everyone can be good at something. Each student can occupy an ecological niche through active exploration and through receiving individual

attention. The following are some ways all students could earn respect and build self-esteem:

1) *Cooperative learning and cross-age tutoring.* Tracking by "ability" level is a widespread practice intended to form relatively homogeneous groups of students in which teachers adjust instruction to a narrow range of students' knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing learning for students in each group. In reality, however, tracking is often hurtful. Minority youths are disproportionately placed in low academic tracks, reinforcing racial isolation in schools and perpetuating racial prejudice among students. The curriculum in the lower tracks tends to be dull and repetitive and to fulfill the prophesy of minimum competency and low expectations. Once placed in a lower track, students have few opportunities to move up, even if their performance improves.

In cooperative learning, students of diverse abilities work together in small groups. They help each other in the process of joint problem solving and receive group recognition as well as individual grades. High achievers clarify their own thinking by explaining material to slower learners. The latter, while benefiting from the instructional help of their peers, also find ways of contributing to the group. For all, research shows that course material is learned more rapidly and is retained longer; critical reasoning powers are developed more effectively than is usually possible when students work alone.

Cross-age tutoring within the student body provides similar benefits for both tutors and their pupils. Tutors can sharpen their own basic skills, while pupils receive individual instruction from positive role models. This technique has been shown to work, with adequate supervision, over a wide range of educational levels.

Both of these techniques are organized in ways that involve students actively in learning so that they are no longer just the passive recipients of lectures.

2) *Flexible scheduling and expanded opportunities for learning.* A fixed class period of forty or fifty minutes may not allow students enough time to learn material in depth. Class schedules should be flexible enough to accommodate an integrated curriculum and joint planning by teachers. When teacher teams control schedules, they can better meet the needs of students, who are able to improve their mastery of subject matter.

Some students need extra time, encouragement, or instruction to learn; moreover, the requirements of many students vary from one time to another. Middle grade schools can take account of the changing needs of students by extending the school day, holding summer school or Saturday programs, offering specialized daily instruction, and encouraging greater family involvement in learning activities. In this way, the school can build on the distinctive strengths of each person and provide opportunities for different kinds of accomplishment.

Responsibility and authority for middle schools should rest primarily with teachers and principals. Professional staff members who are closest to the students need substantial scope and flexibility to make educational decisions at the school site. This means both teachers and administrators. At present, the authority vested in staff members

in elementary and secondary schools, including the middle grades, is severely limited. Yet improvements in education can occur only if teachers have the opportunity to take creative approaches to teaching. In this context, teachers can involve students in weighing some educational options and thereby give them firsthand experience in democratic decision making. Examples of school-site decision-making processes include:

1) *Building governance committees.* Some aspects of school administration affect all teaching teams and houses within the school. A building committee broadly composed of teachers, parents, administrators, support staff, and representatives of community organizations provides a framework large enough to help the principal make wise decisions. Participants work together in establishing goals for the school and in thinking through ways to foster the education and health of students that promote mutual respect and a sense of shared purpose, even in settings of socioeconomic diversity.

2) *Giving teachers greater influence in the classroom.* Teams of teachers should have latitude in determining how best to reach curricular goals. Such teams are in a position to allocate budgets and space, choose instructional methods and materials, develop interdisciplinary themes, and schedule classes. The faculty should be organized in a way that provides time during the school day to make these decisions, to discuss the students teachers have in common, and to seek counsel from colleagues. Dividing large schools into houses requires lead teachers who can shape an environment conducive to team teaching. Within each unit the lead teacher can work with teams to develop ideas, obtain necessary resources to implement these ideas, and overcome obstacles.

Teachers in the middle grades should be specifically prepared to teach young adolescents. Teaching in a middle grade school has not been the first choice for most teachers; indeed many tend to feel apprehensive about dealing with early adolescents. Yet the success of the transformed middle grade school will depend on the desire and competence of teachers to educate young adolescents. Major changes are needed in what teachers learn in becoming middle grade teachers and in how they learn it. Primarily, prospective teachers of this age group need to understand adolescent development so that they can communicate effectively with young people and take advantage of their emerging strengths. This understanding should come from coursework and from direct, supervised teaching in middle grade schools.

Teachers must understand cultural differences since, increasingly in the years ahead, they will be instructing young adolescents of diverse backgrounds. They need preparation in working with one-parent and two-parent families, families of different ethnic backgrounds and races, and families experiencing severe economic or other stresses that may well influence their children's performance in school.

In the restructured middle school, teachers will need to be educated in the principles of guidance in order to serve as advisers; they will also need to learn how to work as members of a team and how to design interdisciplinary, developmentally appropriate programs of study.

After receiving an undergraduate degree, prospective teachers may need to

serve as paid apprentices in a middle grade school under the guidance of mentor teachers. Those who move beyond would be selected on the basis of realistic assessments of their classroom performance rather than by pencil-and-paper tests. They would then undertake graduate-level study leading to a master's degree or certification according to state requirements.

Currently, teachers are licensed or certified for elementary or secondary school, but rarely for the middle grades. Teachers licensed or certified for elementary or secondary school should, on completion of their training in middle grade schools, receive a supplemental endorsement to teach at that level — as a badge of distinctive competence to do an important job.

Families should be allied with school staff through mutual respect and trust. Many studies show that parental involvement benefits students' achievement and attitudes toward school. Despite this, parental involvement declines steadily during the elementary school years and is minimal by the middle grades.

Many parents, believing that adolescence leads promptly to independence, do not want to intrude excessively into their children's lives. Although adolescents do move toward greater autonomy, they nevertheless need continuing contact, interest, and guidance from their parents and other family members. Parental interest in their children's education through adolescence is certainly helpful.

Middle grade school administrators and teachers have not been notably active in encouraging parental interest; some in fact actively discourage it, especially in poor communities where the need for such connections is actually greatest. The task is not easy, but abundant evidence exists that the gulf between school staff and parents can be closed through actions that engender mutual respect. Schools can reengage families by offering parents meaningful roles in important school activities, such as the building governance committees; by keeping parents informed about the ground rules and what their expectations should be so they can monitor the progress of their youngsters; and by asking parents to foster the learning process at home as well as at school — overseeing homework and helping their children overcome obstacles.

Schools and communities should be linked in educating young adolescents. Schools are being asked as a practical matter to take on additional responsibilities, such as dealing with drug abuse. To do so, they need help from strong sectors of society. Resources from the business community, health professions, scientific institutions, community organizations, museums, and colleges and universities can offer invaluable assistance in the educational process. They can augment resources for teachers, ensure students' access to health and social services, offer career guidance, and provide direct support for education.

1) *Business support.* There is an unprecedented surge of business interest in education today. American businesses sponsored 60,000 school-support projects in 1986. Various professions contribute to local nonprofit organizations that help students. Businesses and professional organizations contribute funds, equipment, and skilled personnel in partnership with school systems. Such linkages must increase in the years immediately ahead.

2) *Health and social service support.* Nearly every community has a health department, a family planning clinic, a family counseling agency, or a youth service bureau. Collaboration with the school can make these agencies truly accessible to young adolescents. Interest in school-site coordination of such services, particularly in poor communities, is growing, as will be seen further on.

3) *Support from community organizations.* In an uneven, fragmented way, many organizations have become helpful. Public libraries, settlement houses, churches, YMCAs and YWCAs, Girls Clubs, Boys Clubs, and other agencies provide places to study, tutors, homework clinics, and homework "hotlines." Community organizations also offer alternative education to students who drop out. Many professional and civic groups sponsor scholarships and other incentives to promote academic achievement. Organizations such as Junior Achievement, Future Homemakers of America, and Future Farmers of America offer career guidance, skills building, and encouragement. Boy Scouts of America's fastest growing program is Career Explorers. Professional organizations can help by linking members with groups of students. Some of these organizations are now searching for ways to be more helpful to young people in poor communities.

The health component of early adolescent education

A recurrent cross-cutting theme of *Turning Points* is the intimate relationship between education and health. Illness interferes with learning. Yet it is often an unrecognized factor in the school problems of youngsters. Reciprocally, the protection of health in early adolescence and beyond depends heavily on education. The report points out that adolescents tend to lack adequate health care; a large proportion lack such care altogether. This is not a matter of "growing pains" but of serious problems, some of which require immediate attention. Others are a kind of time bomb set in youth, ready to go off in later years. In both cases, the relation of behavior to health is the key, and the main approach required is one of disease prevention and health promotion.

Because of this link between health and school success, middle grade schools must ensure the availability of health services to adolescents. Early adolescence, as mentioned, is a time of exploratory behavior, when fateful choices about smoking, eating, drugs, and sex are being made — choices that can have lifelong consequences. Middle grade schools have great potential as environments for health promotion, providing salient information and shaping habits toward health for a lifetime.

Life sciences and education for health. The middle schools offer an optimal time for capitalizing on a young person's physical transformations and exploratory behavior by introducing human biology into the regular curriculum. Middle grade schools have never had an organizing principle that distinguishes the education of young adolescents from that of children and youth. Education in the life sciences can provide such a central organizing principle in ways that are developmentally appropriate.

The life sciences can tap into the natural curiosity of young adolescents, who

tend to be interested in living organisms generally — indeed in life itself. They are experiencing the growth spurt that is one of the most striking developmental changes in the entire life span and they are asking such questions as, What's happening to my body? How does the human body work? So it makes great sense to start the life sciences with growth and development, addressing adolescent development specifically and *human* biology generally.

Such interest leads naturally to the exciting frontiers of biology, involving many other species and analysis at the molecular and cellular level. The advances made on these frontiers are among the most rapid and profound in all the sciences.

This in turn leads naturally to the scientific study of behavior. Behavior — what creatures do — is one of the main attributes of living organisms and is the main basis of adaptation for survival in the human species. Since high-risk behavior during adolescence bears strongly on health throughout the life span, there is no better time than this to capture the young person's attention and direct it to the long-term effects of drug use, sexually transmitted diseases, and early pregnancy, as well as nicotine and alcohol intake and poor dietary and activity patterns, which can give rise to cardiovascular disease and cancer.

School as a health-promoting environment. In light of these considerations, it is logical for *Turning Points* to recommend deliberate and systematic efforts to create a health-promoting environment in the middle grade schools. This is manifest not only in classrooms or school-based clinics, but in the cafeteria, on the playground, and in a smoke-free environment. The school should provide clear examples of health-promoting behavior, socially reinforce such behavior, and encourage healthy habits.

Schools should clarify what good nutrition is in the classroom and serve nutritious food in the cafeteria. They should offer programs to help both students and adults quit smoking. The study of the effects of alcohol and illicit drugs on the brain and other organs should be an integral part of education. A major effort should be made to discourage youngsters from using these substances at all. Physical fitness should be a matter of pride for all in the school community. Opportunities for exercise and athletic competition should not be limited to varsity competition between different schools. Physical education should not rest on a sorting process that focuses only on the most talented. Schools should join with parks and recreation departments to provide a variety of physical activities, so that every student can participate. Finally, schools should be safe places. Stopping violence, drug dealing, and the carrying of weapons in and around schools is an urgent challenge.

Ensuring access to health services. The curriculum can contribute to health; the school environment can contribute; the general culture can contribute. But there is still a serious need — now unmet — of young adolescents for accessible health care. It may be at the school, as in so-called school-based health clinics. It may be near the school, or further away, but explicitly connected functionally with the school. In any event, health care must be arranged so that middle grade students clearly recognize that the care is available, is within reach, and is "user friendly." However organized, care would become more effective if it were related to the curriculum and to a health-promoting school environment.

Turning Points recommends that every middle grade school have a health coordinator competent to provide limited medical assessment and treatment. Such a coordinator, specially trained for the purpose, would also refer students as necessary to health services outside the school and coordinate school health education and other health-related activities. That individual would guide the young adolescent through the maze of questions, help in coping with difficulties, and foster the development of healthy behavior.

For those students whose health needs go beyond the resources of school personnel, school-related health facilities have emerged as a promising approach. Their evaluations indicate that adolescents use them extensively, and parents are usually supportive. Most visits are for physical examinations, acute illnesses, and some injuries. Since mental health problems such as depression are common, appropriate services also need to be provided. *Turning Points* recommends the widespread introduction of school-related facilities.

The report recognizes the diversity of local communities and the heterogeneity of values in American society. Local option is important to recognize and respect. The sensitive subject of reproductive health is a modest though significant part of adolescent health. Important as it is to protect against sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, and to protect against early pregnancy, all of this amounts to no more than one-quarter of the total activity of school-related health facilities. There are many other disease problems and much other health promotion to be done during this crucially formative phase of life.

Social support and life skills training

There is an emphasis throughout *Turning Points* on decision making, problem solving, and higher-order thinking skills, exemplified in the life sciences and health areas as well as other aspects of the curriculum. The recurrent theme of social supports for education and health is also relevant to these skills. Social support networks, which can be constructed in and around the middle grade school, can have a powerful effect not only by buffering the stressful vicissitudes of adolescent life but also by shaping behavior in ways that promote health and education in the long run.

The school itself can, as noted, provide powerful supports that are conducive to the promotion of education and health. In addition, institutions such as churches and community organizations that are still relatively strong in many communities can construct activities that serve similar functions. New social support networks are needed where drastic changes in families and in economic opportunity have been associated with considerable loss of traditional support systems.

Intact, cohesive families generally provide opportunities for durable and secure human attachment, constructive models of adaptive behavior, and mediators for the child in learning to cope with the demands of the immediate environment. Typically, in such favorable situations, it is not only the immediate family but relatives and others in the neighborhood or community who fulfill such vital functions. To the extent that families and communities have eroded under the persistent impact of poverty and social depreciation, however, it is necessary to develop

alternative social support networks. While it is vital to strengthen the family to the greatest extent possible, substitute experiences to meet these essential needs are often crucial. Without dependable stimulation, guidance and encouragement, the adolescent transition can lead to disaster.

The task force that prepared *Turning Points* therefore gave a good deal of attention to the question of social supports in and around the middle grade school that can sustain effort and hope. Across the country there are many examples of such support. In addition to examples mentioned earlier, there is the after-school program of the Congress of National Black Churches, called Project SPIRIT, and a youth service program called the Campus Compact that links college students with precollege students in supportive ways.

A report on social support interventions was completed towards the end of 1989 by a task force of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development under the chairmanship of Richard H. Price, director of the Michigan Prevention Research Center at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research. It emphasized the potential of schools and community organizations to meet adolescent needs for social support. The task force not only analyzed the research evidence on social support but carefully reviewed dozens of support programs designed to meet early adolescent needs. The report gives valuable evidence of the effectiveness of a variety of these interventions.

Similarly, the Council has recently completed a report on life skills training, prepared by a task force under the chairmanship of Beatrix A. Hamburg, M.D., professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. It synthesizes an extensive body of research showing how students at various levels can be taught life skills of great practical significance. These are mainly social skills and skills requisite to effective decision making. Useful programs are carefully described.

Middle grade schools can provide their students with knowledge and skills to make informed, deliberate decisions on such vital matters as drug use, sexuality, and educational options. A strong underpinning of knowledge derived in large part from the life sciences curriculum is crucial, but by itself is not enough. Such information combined with training in social skills and decision making can help students resist pressure from peers or from the media to engage in health-damaging behaviors. Such a linkage can increase self-control and self-esteem as well as teach ways to reduce distress without resorting to dangerous activity.

Students can learn these essential skills through systematic instruction and role-playing with constructive feedback. Life skills training has been effective in preventing adolescent substance abuse, especially smoking, in young adolescents as well as in preventing pregnancies among older adolescents. A life skills component in middle grade education can link effectively with the life sciences curriculum to diminish the casualties.

In the transformed middle school, this approach would be an important part of a coordinated program to teach critical thinking, promote healthy lifestyles, develop competence in human relations, and foster sound decision making. Open pathways to successful experiences would enhance students' self-esteem and provide them further reason to avoid high-risk activities.

Conclusion

The recommendations in *Turning Points* and associated reports for transforming middle grade schools into communities of shared educational purpose are for the benefit of all young adolescents. Must we wait to implement these suggestions? What are the appropriate standards to consider with respect to near-term efforts to restructure middle schools? I suggest that the central question should be, Can we do better than we are doing now to educate our young adolescents for the next century? Surely present knowledge, evidence, and experience make it clear that we can do better at providing the conditions under which all our children can grow up healthy and vigorous, inquiring and problem solving, and decent and constructive.

We can draw on the synthesis of existing knowledge that is provided in *Turning Points*, and on the richness of recent innovations, to undertake a serious national effort to reform this neglected phase of education and to continue improving it decade by decade. There is a great opportunity if we start now.

David A. Hamburg

President

REFERENCES

Hamburg, Beatrix A., *Life Skills Training: Preventive Interventions for Young Adolescents*, a working paper of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, April 1990. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.

Millstein, Susan G., *The Potential of School-linked Centers to Promote Adolescent Health and Development*, a working paper of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, August 1988. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.

Price, Richard H.; Cioci, Madalyn; Penner, Wendy; and Trautlein, Barbara, *School and Community Support Programs that Enhance Adolescent Health and Education*, a working paper of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, April 1990. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.

Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century, the report of the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, June 1989. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Education
Research and
Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed

March 29, 1991